

Getting to Healthy Shellfish Beds Through Community Connections

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Community involvement is a key element in the long-term protection of healthy shellfish beds that provide for recreational, tribal, and commercial harvest. In Whatcom County, several shellfish growing areas currently have closed, restricted, or threatened status due to poor or degrading water quality. In addition, in some areas there are concerns that populations of native shellfish may be declining. In 2004, the Whatcom County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) began the first phase of a clam enhancement/restoration project. With the assistance of over forty community volunteers, transect-based clam surveys were conducted in three priority shellfish areas. The location, density, and size of ten types of clams were recorded. This project is providing a greater understanding of the populations of native and introduced clams, involving members of the community in protecting their shellfish beds, and identifying sites for clam enhancement/restoration. In the next phase of the project, the MRC will work with community members to prepare the selected enhancement site(s), seed and monitor the clams, and talk with their peers about protecting this valuable resource. While there have been several successful projects restoring oysters in the Northwest Straits, this is one of the first community clam enhancement/restoration projects.